



United States
of America

Congressional Record

PROCEEDINGS AND DEBATES OF THE 108th CONGRESS, SECOND SESSION

Vol. 150

WASHINGTON, MONDAY, JULY 12, 2004

No. 95

House of Representatives

NORTH CAROLINA'S FAVORITE SON, JOHN EDWARDS

HON. BRAD MILLER

OF NORTH CAROLINA

Madam Speaker, I am very pleased to be here tonight. I did not think I would be pleased to be here. In my office earlier, I was regretting greatly having agreed last week to come down tonight as I saw the time slip away and as I was, instead of dinner, eating the complimentary North Carolina peanuts that we pass out to our visitors, wondering when, if ever, tonight I would get dinner.

Then I heard the speeches of a few minutes ago by the gentleman from Georgia (Mr. Kingston) and by others on the same topic but from a different perspective, and I felt a new energy and a new enthusiasm for our task tonight, and I would like to address some of the questions that the gentleman from Georgia (Mr. Kingston) and the others asked about John Edwards.

First, the gentleman from Georgia (Mr. Kingston) asked why it was that John Edwards did not have to answer any of the insulting questions that were asked of Dan Quayle when the first President Bush asked him to run as Vice President in 1988, and I think that there is a simple answer to that.

The gentleman from Georgia (Mr. Kingston) said that Dan Quayle had been in Congress for 12 years, John Edwards in the Congress for only six, but John Edwards had not been asked why he was qualified to be President when that question was put very pointedly to Mr. Quayle. The gentleman from

Georgia (Mr. Kingston) said he believed it must be because of the liberal media. I think there is a different explanation. John Edwards is smart. John Edwards is smart. Everyone knows he is smart. Everyone who has spent any time around him knows that. He is plenty smart enough to be Vice President. He is plenty smart enough to be President.

Second, the gentleman from Georgia (Mr. Kingston) and all the others said that this is a ticket of two crazy liberals, wild-eyed crazy liberals, out of step with North Carolina or even, they suggested, with Massachusetts, and I just wish they would get their story straight.

John Kerry and John Edwards are the Huck Finns of American politics because they got to attend their own political funeral. In December of last year and early January, they appeared to be politically dead.

Their campaigns were not going anywhere. The former governor of Vermont, Howard Dean, appeared to be walking away with the Democratic nomination. A respected political reporter here, Stuart Rothenberg, wrote a column that said, "It ain't over till it's over, but it's over." Howard Dean was assumed to be the nominee.

So all the right-wing commentators began talking about how the Democrats were going to nominate a crazy liberal in Howard

Dean; and, to establish that contrast, they said the Democrats were rejecting sensible, thoughtful, moderate candidates like John Kerry and John Edwards. Things did not go according to their script, and now the ticket is John Kerry and John Edwards, and those same thoughtful, sensible, moderate folks that just a few months ago they were praising, they now are tarring with the same brush that they tarred Howard Dean.

Also, they need to get their story straight because just last week, in the hours immediately after John Kerry had announced that he had asked John Edwards to run on the ticket with him, the first response from the Bush-Cheney campaign was a 26-page e-mail that outlined all of these differences, all these differences between Kerry and Edwards, they just had nothing in common, and it just showed how flagrantly political John Kerry was to have asked someone with whom he agreed so little to run as Vice President with him.

Very quickly they abandoned that. Now they say they are just alike. There is absolutely no balance to this ticket; they are exactly alike. The same voting record. They are two peas in a left-wing pod. Again, their story would have a little more credibility if they would stick with it for just a little while. In fact, both John Edwards and John Kerry are moderate in the best sense, not in some voting record and how they have reacted in the last 2 years to take-it-or-leave-it propositions, bills that have not been put to them to vote "yes" or "no," bills that have not been compromised an iota. That is not the test of their moderation. It is their willingness to compromise, to try to find common ground, to try to find sensible solutions, to listen to everyone involved in the political debate, to listen respectfully, to respect their views and concerns, and to listen carefully because they might actually learn something. Would that not be refreshing to have in a President and Vice President?

I was also startled to hear our colleagues on the other side of the aisle say that John Edwards and John Kerry were out of touch and criticized them so sternly for being wealthy, for being rich. This is a party

that treats the richest folks like rock stars. They are almost embarrassing in their fawning over rich folks. And the richer the folks are, the more fawning they are, the more unctuous they are around them. But that is not the point. The point is not the success John Edwards has had.

Yes, John Edwards has been very, very successful. We used to call that the American Dream. The point is where he started out and what he learned from that. John Edwards, and I know they are tired of hearing the story of his being the son of a mill worker, but it is true and it is important. He understands what most folks' lives are like because that is the kind of life he lived. His father worked in the mill, his mother worked in the post office, as my father worked in the post office.

John Edwards' life was like most Americans' lives. He had to depend on the public schools to get ahead, to have opportunities for him. Wallace and Bobbi Edwards, John Edwards' parents, could not have sent John Edwards to some expensive New England boarding school. He had to go to the public schools. And John Edwards understands to the depth of his soul the importance of public education for middle-class Americans, the importance of public education in creating opportunities for ordinary Americans.

John Edwards never got into any school on anything but his own merit. He never got into any college, he did not get into law school because of who his daddy was. He got in because he earned his way. He has earned his way his entire life. He has never had anything given to him, and he will understand the lives of ordinary Americans because of that.

They have talked about his role as a trial lawyer and the money that he made and how that now puts him out of touch. I can tell you what a trial lawyer does. The suggestion that he handled frivolous cases and made a fortune off that is ridiculous. He took the cases that had merit. He took the cases where people had been harmed because someone had not done what they should have done.

John Edwards had to explain to juries how people who had suffered a terrible injury, how their lives had changed. He had to explain what their life was like before the injury, what their hopes were, what their aspirations, what they wanted their future to be like; and then he had to explain to the jury how that had changed and what their life was like after the terrible injury that they had suffered. And he had to explain the lives of many different people from many different walks of life.

I can tell you this, before you explain something to a jury, you have to understand it yourself. He was past master at understanding intellectually and at the pit of his stomach what peoples' lives were like, the lives they led and how their lives changed. And that would be a wonderful asset to have as a President or as a Vice President.

Finally, I want to address the lack of experience, the issue that they raise. That was, of course, part of the Dan Quayle debate as well. I was very startled to hear the gentleman from Georgia (Mr. Kingston) describe that John Edwards had had less than 10 years of, his phrase was, public service, which I take to mean years in a political office. It was just 10 years ago that the members of the majority party campaigned for term limits. They characterized public service as career politicians. Now, 10 years later, they say that 6 years in political office is entirely too little experience, too little time in public life.

I think that the debate tonight of the gentleman from Georgia (Mr. Kingston) reminds us all how out of touch the majority party has become in 10 years and how if we want to have leadership in touch with the lives of ordinary Americans we need to change our leadership.